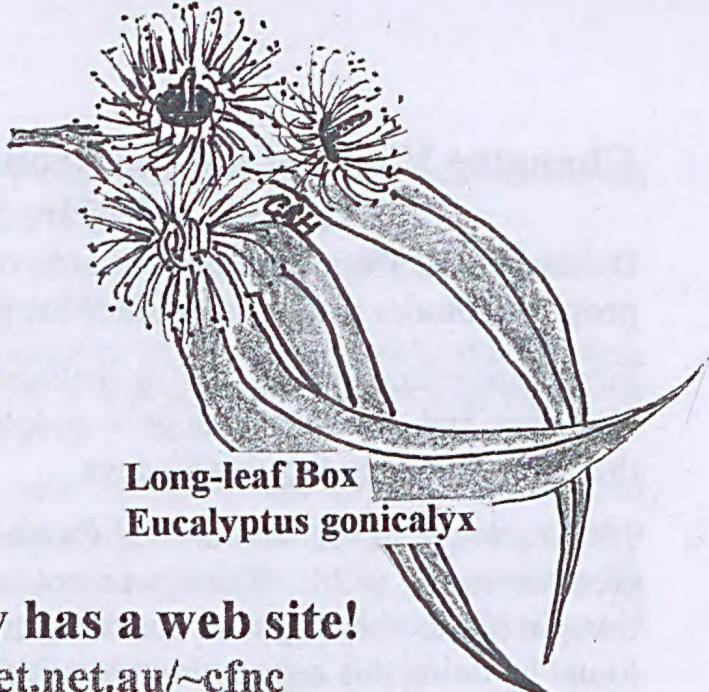


Castlemaine Naturalist

April 2005
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The Club now has a web site!

The address is <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~cfnc>

In the first fortnight 12 people visited the home page. The site is open to anyone in the world. For a while, most of the visitors will be people who know the address. However, as other sites put links to our club site, we can expect more visitors. In time, our site will be indexed by search engines and it will be able to be found by anyone.

Some of the things on the site so far include:

- comment (e.g. mistletoes)
- the Club program
- excursion localities (so far, this is the largest section)
- a district bird list, weed list, geology site list etc.
- nature notes and observations
- about the Club, and a membership application form
- publications list
- links to other web sites.

What else should be placed on the site? Do you have photographs taken on Club outings? Are you willing to have your items in the newsletter added to our web site? Please let me know.

Your comments and involvement are invited.

Ern Perkins

Editor's Note: We are very fortunate to have someone like Ern to provide this facility for our club. Many hours of work are involved in the initial setting up of the site and also in the updating of material now that the site is established. This site will help ensure the ongoing success of our club by providing a contact for new members and access to additional information for existing members. Your input is sought and will add to the success of the project.

Changing Views of the Box Ironbark Country of North Central Victoria. - Deidre Slattery - 11/3/05

Deidre talked about attitudes towards our local environment and wondered if people's attitudes had changed since the gold rush.

First impressions in the 1850's included a sighting of a "local bear" which was shot and fed to the dogs - people not knowing or appreciating things that were around in those early days.

150 years ago all the land around Castlemaine was cleared in the search for the precious metal, gold. There was not a tree to be seen. In the 1850's people thought it was their right to cut down trees, sometimes for no reason, but they found by doing this a great number of things changed. The water quality became poor, the climate changed, there were floods and soil was washed away. After the alluvial mining declined sluicing started doing more damage to the environment. This left the landscape bare, scarred and void of any trees.

Now there is a changing direction toward revegetating our goldfields.

Major Mitchell, in the early 1800's, said that the land was there to be used. The first squatters, in about 1844, got the best pieces of land, usually grassy woodland, the second run of squatters got the second best land, and so on. Today, land that has been farmed for many generations often has the most weeds and "useless" land, that was not taken up back then and so remained comparatively untouched, is considered, by those interested in biodiversity etc., to be our most valuable land.

Some of the early settlers, however, really appreciated the native wildlife, giving vivid descriptions of the birds and plants. They greatly valued the beauty of the bush.

Debbie Worland

Macedon Regional Park Foothills – 12/3/05.

Five members journeyed from Castlemaine to Macedon to meet five members from more southern parts on a pleasantly warm afternoon. The location was approx. 2km. north of the Macedon Railway station in the SW corner of the Macedon Regional Park.

Our walk was mainly through Dry Peppermint/Box Forest – one of the five vegetation associations in the Regional Park. Some of the group ventured down to the valley of Railway Creek where some wet gully species were evident.

Over 400 species of trees, shrubs, grasses, ferns and orchids etc. are recorded in the park; and over 165 bird species, including nine which are significant locally, regionally or nationally. There are approximately 30km. of walking tracks in

and around the Macedon Regional Park which would be an interesting springtime venue for another outing.

Richard Piesse

Observations of interest on the Macedon Walk –

*We noticed “sawdust” at the base of a number of box trees - fairly sturdy black ants about 3 mm long were making nests in the wood - sawdust was falling at regular intervals from one of the holes.

*We found several large fungi with pale orange-cream caps with scattered scales in a concentric pattern - up to 14 or 15 cms across with quite thick stems - almost as wide as the cap in a newly emerged specimen. The gills were a bit darker orange-cream. The fungi were very firm to touch, and very attractive, I thought. I couldn't find anything quite like them in my fungi books.

*There was a wide concrete pipe set into the ground with some tap-like structures inside and there were dozens of Crane-flies in it. At first I thought that they were caught in spider webs, but when I placed my hand in the pipe I realized they were free, but apparently clinging together at times.

Bird List. There weren't a lot of birds, probably because things are still so dry, even in the Macedon area, but we did record White-throated Treecreeper, Rufous Whistler, White-eared Honeyeater, Crimson Rosella, Grey Fantail, Spotted Pardalote, White-naped Honeyeater, Grey Shrike-thrush and female Flame Robin. I'm afraid that is scarcely 1/10 of the official list.

Rita Mills

Prescribed Burning

Parks Vic and DSE have a program of burning for the local forests. It is a great chance for this club to do some research into the effects of this burning. Because the first burns of the season are imminent, some members have started making surveys.

The standard method of assessing vegetation and vegetation change is to make a detailed study of 30 x 30 metre squares (called 30 x 30 metre quadrats). So far, eight quadrats (or four pairs) have been set up. The pairs have been on either side of a roadway or water race at the proposed burn boundary. For each quadrat, a plant list has been made, and the abundance of each plant assessed.

The quadrats are along Jacobs Track, Poverty Gully Track, Fryers Ridge Road and Poverty Gully Race (near the Monk). Despite being a dry autumn, 94 species were identified in these quadrats. Only four species occurred in each quadrat: Tussock Grass (*Poa*), Red-anther Wallaby-grass, Black-anther Flax-lily and Red Stringybark.

The quadrats will give a base survey from which changes after burning can be assessed. If you would like to be involved in the program, please let me know.

Ern Perkins

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

The Swifties Have Returned

24/3/05. Despite a lack of Yellow-gums blossoms and lerps, a small group of swift parrots flew out of Margaret Badminton's block into the Golf Course this morning.
Debbie Worland.

Norman's Possum Deterrent.

A few weeks ago, when I visited a neighbour to purchase some of his choice butternut pumpkins, he showed me a sizeable laminated photo of an owl which he had placed a couple of feet above ground level on the base of a huge willow which shelters his house and back garden. He explained that it had been suggested that an effigy of an owl would scare off the plague of possums which used the tree to access the roof of his house to reach the power lines leading across the street. He decided to try the poster, which actually appeared to work – no more possum droppings or noisy traffic across the roof! But when I returned this week to replenish the pumpkin supply, he reported that he will have to rethink the problem. The possums have now reversed the journey - approaching from across the street via power lines and pole to his house - galloping noisily across the roof to a long thin branch of the willow above a workbench in the garden and dropping some metres on to it. All in order to avoid the main trunk of the willow. Norman intends to make arrangements to remove this high branch if possible. We'll keep you informed!

Shirley Parnaby

Albany and the Horrible Three – Nigel Harland

You may recall that in my last article I made it very clear that I was trying very hard to reach the target of 600 birds on the Australian list. The trip up to the Strzelecki Track and back yielded a fine return as did a week's holiday on Lord Howe Island, but they left me 7 short of the magic figure. A trip to Chiltern gave me the Turquoise Parrot and two days at the Werribee Sewage Farm (or whatever it is called these days) yielded an unexpected Northern Shoveller, but not the planned Ruff. Where could I go next? I discovered that Western Australia had a number of species I had never seen and our daughter and boyfriend are currently living in Fremantle. So we started to arrange things.

It all came to pass in February and March this year. We spent some time in the Margaret River area, birding, bicycling and imbibing. We found the Western Yellow Robin (596), cycled and walked long distances and recovered with a few glasses of the local product. Then back to Freo, time with daughter and a trip to Rottnest Island with a guy we met on Lord Howe Island. We took bikes with us and managed to cycle all round the island. It is a quite idyllic place and I would love to spend more time there. Introduced birds are not terribly satisfying, but

they are on the list, so the Pheasant and Laughing Turtle-Dove have to count (598). On the Western coast we stopped and managed to identify about a dozen Roseate Terns (599). They are beautiful birds and stood out amongst the Crested Terns which are not in the least beautiful. The other bird we hoped to find on the island was the Rock Parrot. Michael (our friend from Lord Howe), had seen one almost every time he had been to Rottnest, so we were highly optimistic. However, our optimism was misplaced and we dipped out. Back to Fremantle with 599.

Next day we were picked up by Jonny Schoenjahn, a bird guide from Broome, who was going to take us to Albany. On the way we hoped to pick up the Mute Swan and Blue-breasted fairy wren. I wrestled with the Mute Swan – how could that be my 600th bird? I decided it couldn't, so we avoided the places we were likely to see it and headed straight for Dryandra and the wren. It didn't take long to find, males half way between eclipse and full plumage and quite unafraid of our presence. We spent quite some time watching (600). Next day we headed a little out of our way to find the Western Corella. It is only found in two smallish spots in the Southwest. We picked them up in the middle of the day and got really good views (601) and then drove to Albany.

The aim at Albany was to find the "horrible three". These are birds which inhabit coastal shrubland and spend all their time on the ground under dense cover. They pop out occasionally, have a bit of a look around and then return to their normal pursuits – totally out of sight. The three birds are the Noisy Scrub-bird, the Western Bristlebird and the Western Whipbird. The Noisy Scrub-bird was thought to be extinct until the 1960's when it was rediscovered. It has an amazingly vocal call, but is very difficult to find. Two Peoples Bay is a National Park some 30km from Albany and this is where all three birds are possible. We set off at 5am the next morning. Lots of calls but, apart from a dark blur crossing the road some distance away, we saw nothing. Breakfast and a walk along the rocks near the beach leading to a walking track into the scrub. We heard the call of a Noisy Scrub-bird not too far away, so we found a spot on the track which allowed us to see in two directions and settled down. Soon the calling got closer and eventually it seemed to come from the bush next to us, but no sign of any movement. Gradually the call receded and we felt the opportunity had been missed. But then the bird appeared on the track about 15 meters from where we were. It was clearly a Noisy Scrub-bird, even though it only stayed within view for a few seconds – long enough to focus the binoculars on it (602). Even though the markings are not highly distinctive, the feeling on seeing the bird was quite remarkable. One of the horrible three on the first day and we planned to stay five days, so hopes were high.

Next day we drove to Cheyne's Beach, similar habitat, but a little further than Two Peoples Bay. Again there were calls of all three species and although we got very close, we never had a view, let alone a good view. A similar outing on

the following day produced the same result and a depressing lunch break at the entrance to Waychinicup National Park. However, just as lunch had finished and we were about to set off, we heard the Western Bristlebird not too far away. We headed to where we thought it called from, but no luck. Then we saw a bird on the track, it certainly was a Western Bristlebird and before long there was a family of four birds all in good view (603). Again a very satisfying feeling that we had persevered, even though the bird was just dull brown with few distinguishing features. Two out of three birds found and two days left, surely we could find the Western Whipbird. The next two days were spent searching for it and at one stage we flushed a bird from a shrub not two meters in front of us, but the flight was so fast, it was impossible to identify. Lots of calls, but no birds and time ran out. One consolation was the sighting of a Rock Parrot on the cliffs at Two Peoples Bay (604).

All in all we had a terrific trip, with good company, good food and 9 new birds. No Western Whipbird and no Mute Swan! However there was a pelagic trip out to sea off the Southeast corner of Tasmania on the way home. I have never been out to sea, so this was to be a real experimental trip. Watch this space!

Book Review - Owls – Journeys around the world.

By David Hollands. Published by “Blooming Books”

David Hollands’ first owl book “Birds of the Night” published in 1999 – was a study of Australia’s Owls, Frogmouths and Nightjars, and in particular featured some of the Powerful Owls to be found locally at that time. “Journeys Around the World” visits owls in Alaska, Oregon, Costa Rica, Argentina, Finland, UK and Europe, South Africa, Christmas Islands, Japan, Queensland and finally the magnificent powerful owls of Victoria. The camera studies are superb. To quote from the final chapter –

“To hear a Powerful Owl call is to experience one of the great thrills of night-time in the Australian forest.”

As my grandson remarked after hearing the owls call during the breeding season, while at school camp some years ago in the bush at the back of Guildford – “It was awesome!” which is also an appropriate description of this book.

Shirley Parnaby

Editors Note: David Hollands will be giving a talk entitled “Owls of the World” at the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club meeting on October 12, at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building , Old High St., Golden Square. Meeting starts 7.30pm, talk at 8pm.

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros. in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450. Ph. 5474 2244, or gedharris@castlemaine.net Please submit articles by the fourth Thursday of the month.

Observations

- A Brush-tailed Possum, a Sugar Glider and a small Echidna found in quick succession in tree hollows at Barkers Creek. Edward Oram
- Silvereye's nest (deep cup-shaped nest hung in a shrub by two attachments) - five very dark wallabies (Black Wallabies) at the cnr of McGrath and Duke Street, just across the creek – unusually close to town. Penny Garnett
- White-browed Babblers (9) and Black-chinned Honeyeaters (4-6) at the Castlemaine Golf Course. Debbie Worland
- Yellow-tailed Cockatoos Reports:
 - in George Broadway's pine tree (24), but kept going when they noticed White-cockatoos had got there first.
 - at Blackwood and also at Macedon Regional Park where their shrill warning call alerted the party to an Eagle overhead. Richard Piesse
 - near Lancefield, also Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Long-billed Corellas Robin van Smerdijk
- At Gobur in the Strathbogies we watched a black and yellow wasp holding a spider by the head and dragging it backwards. It went across the road, up a log where it fell into a hollow, back onto the ground, over tussock grass - eventually pulling its prey into hole in a tussock where it would be used in its paralyzed state as a fresh food source for its emerging young. Ern Perkins
- Jerusalem Creek control burn site – couple of years ago. Native Cherry ring-barked by fire looking perfectly healthy with new growth at top. Damaged bark had not had usual affect because of the parasitic nature of the plant – the undamaged root system able to provide resources from host plant. Ern Perkins
- Tawny Frogmouth at Gold Treatment Plant at Maldon - and also in residence at Sage Cottage, Fryerstown; 10/3 Bluebells still out on Mt Alexander; lots of Long-leaf Box in flower all around district; four Wedge-tailed Eagles – on walk with David Banear; Kangaroo in top end of Botanic Gardens – over the creek . Richard Piesse

EVCs – What are they? Friends of BIB Walk-Sun April 17. Ian Higgins (0418 539 670 wk) will walk you through several of these Ecological Vegetation Classes, pointing out their main features. 9.30am IGA Car Park BYO drink/etc.

From the Business Meeting 24/3/05

Welcome to new members: Rose Watson and partner.

- The new Castlemaine FNC Information and Publications Display is in place at the library – Thanks to Athol and Ern.
- Ern's report on his recent SEANA campout at Eildon. Link from CFN website or by SEANA Website
- Hans to attend special meeting with council regarding C24 amendment.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

April 2005

General meetings (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Excursions (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the old Tourist Information Centre (TIC) opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and afternoon tea.

Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 27 Doveton Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

April

Fri 8 Mistletoes. Lindy MacRaid, Biodiversity Team, Deakin Uni. 8pm.

Sat 9 Forest Creek to Chinaman's. Leader: Chris Morris, Ph 9885 4221

Wed 20- Fri 22 Club Visit to Robinvale. Contact: Ern Perkins, Ph 5472 3124

Sat 30 Roadside Cleanu. Meet near Tait Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 8.30am. Gloves, garbage bags and red safety vests supplied.

Wear sturdy footwear. Contact: Hans van Gemert Ph 5472 1082

May

Fri 13 Habitat. James Radford, Biodiversity Team, Deakin Uni. 8pm.

Sat 14 Habitat Walk. (with James Radford).Richard Piesse, Ph. 5472 3191.

Sat 14, Sun 15 Threatened Bird Network Swift Parrot Survey.

Bird Spotters wanted Sat. 8am – noon and Sun. 1.30pm. Contact: Ern Perkins

Sat 21 Heritage Festival Walks. A long and a short walk (details to come).

June

Fri 10 Birding off the SE Coast of Tasmania. Nigel Harland. 8pm.

Sat 11 Herons Reef. Richard Piesse.

2005 Committee

Rita Mills (Pres).....Ph. 5472 4553 George Broadway (Sec). Ph. 5472 2513

Hans van Gemert (Treas)Ph. 5472 1082 Richard Piesse.....Ph.5472 3191

Ern Perkins (Web).....Ph. 5472 3124 Athol Dorman

Nigel Harland.....Ph. 5472 8246 Chris MorrisPh. 9885 4221

Geraldine Harris (Ed).....Ph. 5474 2244, gedharris@castlemaine.net

Subscriptions for 2005

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist*.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc., PO Box 324, Castlemaine. Inc #A0003010B

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